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ABSTRACT

The effect of student teaching experience on attitudes toward exceptional children was investigated in 70 prospective teachers in the field of elementary and/or special education. Ss were administered the Attitude Toward Disabled Persons Scale (ATDP) and the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory (MTAI) prior to and during the final week of the 5-week student teaching assignment. Findings supported the major hypothesis that student teaching effect will not differ significantly between elementary education and special education student teachers when measured by the MTAI and ATDP. It was also found that there were no significant differences in the attitudes of students majoring in elementary education and those of students in a combined program of elementary and special education when measured by the MTAI and ATDP. (SB)

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THE EFFECT OF THE STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE UPON SELECTED ATTITUDES OF ELEMENTARY AND COMBINED PROGRAM ELEMENTARY AND SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENT TEACHERS

Exceptional children are currently being integrated into the mainstream of education. Most teacher education programs produce teachers equipped to deal with children who fall within a narrow range of behavior. When children differ culturally, physically or in cognitive style, most of our teachers are unable to cope. (Hurley 1971) This study developed as the result of concern for the elementary education student teacher's attitude toward exceptional children. The second concern was the limited studies on attitudes of student teachers who were preparing to teach exceptional children.

The central problem of this study was to investigate the effect of the student teaching experience upon selected attitudes of prospective teachers in the field of elementary and in a combined program of elementary and in a combined program of elementary and special education. The three general research questions are: 1) Does the student teaching experience affect the prospective teacher's attitude toward teaching? 2) Does the student teaching experience affect the prospective teacher's attitude toward handicapped children? 3) Does the student teaching experience result in different attitudinal effects with the

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elementary or elementary and special education student teacher?

The sample for this study was 70 student teachers who were enrolled in the College of Education at Miami University during the academic year 1973-74. The age range of the students was from 20 through 25 years with the exception of one individual who was 33 years of age. All of the subjects were engaged in a practicum experience in elementary education. The 30 students in a combined program were engaged in a practicum experience in elementary and in special education. The student teaching experience at Miami University was for a total of ten weeks. The 4[illegible] elementary education majors were engaged in student teaching in an elementary classroom for a total of ten weeks within the regular elementary education setting. The 30 students in the combined program were in a regular elementary classroom for five weeks and in the special education classroom for a five week period of time. Both groups of students were engaged for a total of ten weeks in a student teaching experience.

The subjects were asked to volunteer to participate in this research study. The 70 subjects were tested at least one week prior to beginning the student teaching assignment. The 70 subjects were re-tested during the

final week of the student teaching assignment.

This study was limited to 40 elementary education student teachers and 30 elementary and special education student teachers during the winter and spring quarters of the academic year 1973-74 and who volunteered to participate in the study.

The limitations of the ATDP in this study were 1) the instrument was not specifically designed to measure attitude toward children with learning disorders. The instrument was designed to measure the acceptance of disabled and handicapped individuals. 2) Another limitation of this instrument may be either the direct or implied reference of some test items to visual disabilities. Since learning disorders are not visually recognized, reference to physical abnormalities was a possible weakness in the Attitude Toward Disabled Persons Scale.

The amount of time, five weeks, that the special education student teacher spent in the classroom with exceptional children could be a limiting consideration. While results of previous studies have shown that the cooperating teacher does influence the attitude of the student teacher, the purpose of this study was an investigation of the effects of the complete student teaching experience upon the attitude of the student teacher.

Selectivity of the students was exemplified by the fact that Miami student's have an American College Testing Composite mean score of 24.5 compared to a national mean average of 20.1. While the other state supported Universities in Ohio report that 38% of their students come from families with an annyal income of under $12,000, Miami University reports on 21%.

The two instruments utilized in the study were: MTAI and ATDP. The MTAI was developed by Cook, Leeds and Callis (1951) from research carried on concerning the attitudes of teachers toward children and school work. The MTAI was specifically designed to measure those attitudes of a teacher which predict how well he will get along with pupils in interpersonal relationships, and indirectly how well satisfied he will be with teaching.

At the top of the scale is the teacher who is able to maintain a harmonious relationship with his pupils characterized by affection and sympathetic understanding. At the lower end of the scale is the teacher who attempts to dominate the classroom.

MTAI contains 150 statements designed to sample opinions about teacher-pupil relations. The possible range of scores on the MTAI is from plus 150 to minus 150.

The ATDP is a Likert-type of scale in which the subjects express the degree of agreement or disagreement with

each statement on a six-point continuum. There is evidence that this instrument is valid in measuring the adjustment of disabled persons in industrial situations and in measuring the acceptance attitudes of others toward the disabled. The scale is designed to measure attitudes toward specific disability groups. One of the advantageous features of this scale is that subjects can complete the procedure in fifteen minutes.

The student teachers were divided into two groups. Group I consisted of students who were majoring in elementary education. Group II consisted of students who had a combined major of elementary and special education.

The hypotheses along with conclusions are as follows:

Major Hypothesis and Conclusion

The student teaching effect will not differ significantly between elementary education and special education student teachers when measured by the MTAI and ATDP.

An F test analysis of variance was utilized to determine the significance of effects of the student teaching experience of Group I and Group II student teachers.

MTAI revealed an F value of .00 for differences between the pretest F value .09 and posttest F value of .06 for Group I and II which was not significant at the .05 level.

ATDP revealed an F value of .04 for differences between the pretest F value .01 and posttest F value of .57 for Group I and II which was not significant at the .05 level. No significant difference was revealed at .05 level. The major hypothesis was, therefore, accepted.

The Secondary Hypothesis and Conclusions are:

There is no significant difference in the at itudes of students majoring in elementary education and students in a combined program of elementary and specail education when measured by the MTAI prior to the student teaching experience .

Hypothesis 2 and Conclusion

There is no significant difference in the attitudes of students majoring in elementary education and students in a combined program of elementary and special education when measured by the Attitude Toward Disabled Persons prior to student teaching.

Hypothesis 3 and Conclusion

There is no significant difference in the attitudes of students majoring in elementary and students in a combined program of elementary and special education when measured by MTAI as a result of student teaching. Calculations reveal no significance for post score at .05 level. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was accepted.

Hypothesis 4 and Conclusion

There is no significant difference in the attitudes of students majoring in elementary and in a combined program of elementary and special education when measured by ATDP as a result of student teaching. Calculations reveal no significance for posttest. Therefore, hypothesis 4 was accepted.

Hypothesis 5 and Conclusion

There is no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female students majoring in elementary education and combined program of elementary and special education student teachers when measured by the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory prior to the student teaching experience. Calculations reveal no significance for pretest. Therefore, hypothesis 5 was accepted.

Hypothesis 6 and Conclusion

There is no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female students majoring in elementary education and combined program elementary and special education student teachers when measured by the ATDP Scale prior to the student teaching experience. Calculations reveal no significance for pretest at .05 level. Therefore, hypothesis 6 was accepted.

Hypothesis 7 and Conclusion

There is no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female students in elementary and in the combined program of elementary and special education when measured by the MTAI as a result of the student teaching experience. Calculations reveal no significance for posttest at .05 level. Therefore, hypothesis 7 was accepted.

Hypothesis 8 and Conclusion

There is no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female students majoring in elementary education and combined program elementary and special education student teachers when measured by the ATDP Scale as a result of the student teaching experience. Calculations reveal no significance for posttest at .05 level. Therefore, hypothesis 8 was accepted.

Two conclusions may be drawn from this study.

1. The student teaching experience did not reveal significant effects upon the attitude toward teaching of students majoring in elementary education and combined program elementary and special education when measured by the MTAI.

2. The student teaching experience did not reveal significant effects upon the attitude toward exceptional

children of students majoring in elementary and combined program elementary and special education when measured by the ATDP.

Discussion of the Research

The absence of any significant findings in the effects upon attitude toward teaching and toward exceptional children may be explained in several ways.

1. Students in the School of Education at Miami University and particularly elementary and combined program elementary and special education are more homogenous than hetergeneous.

2. The selection of subjects was self selection or volunteering to participate in this research. The nature of the population could have implications on the findings.

3. The five week period of time that the combined program elementary and special education student teachers came into contact with exceptional children was a relatively short time for attitudinal change.

4. The ATDP was chiefly aimed to test visible disabilities and not invisible ones that are more often displayed in the educable mentally retarded and learning disabled population in the classroom.

5. The sampling of males was very limited and to draw generalities from this small a sample size was not

justifiable. While the males in Group I and Group II were analyzed non significance was revealed.

Implications

This was an exploratory study which attempted to investigate the relationship of student teaching to the attitude toward teaching and the attitude toward exceptional children of prospective teachers.

The following recommendations are made:

1. There should be other studies undertaken to replicate this study:
   a) in other geographic regions
   b) with larger samples and with more males included in the samples
   c) with varied groups of education majors
2. Additional studies on the interpersonal attributes of prospective and inservice teachers should be undertaken.
3. Research on teacher attitude toward handicapped children should be continued.
4. Additional exploration of the methods utilized in teacher training programs that have the greatest impact on prospective teachers.

Dr Rosemary E. Speer